

Thurmond Brands Story On Sale of Land a 'Smear'

By Bruce Galphin
Washington Post Staff Writer

9/20/69

COLUMBIA, S.C., Sept. 19 —In a rambling, two-hour press conference on home ground, Sen. J. Strom Thurmond alleged that Life magazine "libeled" him about a land deal to damage his influence in Washington and to embarrass his friends, presidential aide Harry Dent and Judges Clement F. Haynsworth and Charles E. Simons. Life reported that Thurmond and Simons received nearly 2½ times as much per acre for property they jointly owned as adjoining land condemned for Interstate 20 in Aiken County, S.C.

"Maybe they didn't know they could go into court," Thurmond said of his neighbors. "If anybody didn't get full value, I feel sorry for them."

But the senator and the judge made it clear they believed their own property was worth far more than the \$32,500 it brought. It was prime industrial property, they said in separate statements, and its bisection by I-20 destroyed its industrial potential. Life ignored that fact, they contended.

"This article was certainly calculated to smear me, Thurmond declared. "It was designed to do harm to Judge Haynsworth, for the Northern liberals do not want Judge Haynsworth on the Supreme Court..."

"Furthermore, it was aimed at Judge Simons because he

has been mentioned as a possible replacement for Judge Haynsworth on the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals...

"The article also was designed to destroy Harry Dent's effectiveness with President Nixon, because of his association with me."

Thurmond, who is considered a key figure in Mr. Nixon's political dealings with the South, openly supported Judge Donald Russell for the Supreme Court but was reportedly in favor of Haynsworth all along.

The South Carolina senator today accused State Democratic Party chairman Don Fowler of feeding the land story of Life. Fowler could not be reached for comment.

Thurmond and Simons not only read their own statements but presented a string of experts, lawyers, friends and political acquaintances.

Both the senator and the judge declined to say if they would sue Life.

The senator said he owned no stocks or bonds, and severed other business ties when he went to the senate. Real estate is about the only investment left for him, he said, and "I'm not ashamed of it."

Land development specialist C. B. Spivey said similar land had been selling for \$500 to \$1,000 an acre. Spivey said he wasn't familiar enough with adjacent property to say whether the \$200 an acre it brought under condemnation was a fair price.